



## The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

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### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## First Lady Nez addresses the Utah Task Force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women

**WINDOW ROCK, Ariz.** – On Saturday, Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez and First Lady Phefelia Nez joined 24th Navajo Nation Council Delegates Nathaniel Brown, Amber Kanazbah Crotty, and Charlaine Tso during the Utah Task Force on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIW) to state the need to reunite and heal families impacted by the MMIW epidemic through intergovernmental partnerships and coordination.

In March 2020, the Utah state legislature passed a bill to establish the task force to investigate the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and relatives in the state.

“On behalf of the Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President, we extend our appreciation to Utah House Representative Angela Romero, Utah State Senator David Hinkins, the task force members, partners, and volunteers, for inviting us to the meeting to address a sensitive and critical issue impacting tribal communities. It requires patience, unbreakable focus, and unconditional commitment to identify gaps and barriers that families, survivors, and victims encounter. Our work continues within each of our tribal communities, but together with coordination and dedication, we can heal, restore, and reunite families,” said First Lady Nez.

First Lady Nez also spoke about her experience as an appointed member of the New Mexico MMIW Task Force, which New Mexico Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham created, and acknowledged U.S. President Joe Biden for issuing a new Executive Order on Nov. 15, to work hand in hand with Tribal Nations and Tribal partners to build safe and healthy tribal communities and to support comprehensive law enforcement, prevention, intervention, and support services to help address missing and murdered Indigenous people.

During the meeting, President Nez highlighted the need for the tribal, state, and federal partners to collaboratively gather data, analyze data, and provide recommendations regarding the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives crisis affecting tribal communities.

“We understand that there are many barriers and lack of resources to help locate and resolve missing person cases in tribal communities. However, the Nez-Lizer Administration continues to

help guide initiatives to reunite families. Far too many Navajo families continue to endure the heartache and frustration of a missing loved one. We have to continue to work together to do more for our people,” said President Nez.

Navajo Nation Criminal Investigation Director Michael Henderson highlighted ongoing efforts to establish a Missing Persons Unit under the Navajo Nation Division of Public Safety that will have the personnel, funding, and resources to help find missing persons. He also mentioned the ongoing efforts between the Navajo Division of Public Safety and federal agencies to bring awareness to unsolved cases and bring justice for victims and their families.

First Lady Nez also shared her internal workgroup known as the “Diné Nihik’éeí Nihíí’ Násdłijj’: Work Group, Reunite our Diné Relatives,” to address issues and concerns impacting Navajo families. Currently, the workgroup is strengthening the Navajo Nation Tribal Community Response Plan to improve coordination and response to deter violence against women and children.

“Most importantly, the workgroup is also guided by the Diné Action Plan, which utilizes the traditional Navajo planning model of Nitsáhákees (thinking), Nahat’á (planning), Iiná (action), and Siihásin (reflection) to help address public safety, violence, substance abuse, suicide, and missing and murdered Diné relatives on the Navajo Nation. It also encourages the Navajo Nation, state, and federal agencies to strengthen intergovernmental coordination, response, and data collections to reduce violent crimes among women, children, and vulnerable populations,” added First Lady Nez.

The Utah Task Force MMIW meeting included presentations from the U.S. Attorney General, Federal Bureau of Investigation, University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law, Utah Department of Public Safety, Restoring Ancestral Winds, and Native Search Solutions.

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